

Daily Devotional During “Social Distancing”

The following provides a daily meditation for this season of “social distancing.” Following the Spirit of the Living God into the world, we live in the period known as “Ordinary Time” – the growing space between Pentecost and Advent. Though we worship “apart,” may we journey “together” into the new life that Christ has brought us and the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us. May the Church grow ever deeper into the love and hope of God.

“Ordinary Time” (Growing Season)

Monday, September 7

Read: Exodus 12:14-28

Reflection:

The Passover was intended as a perpetual remembrance of what God had done for Israel. Every year, every generation, the people would remember God’s redemption *as if it was being done to them*. This kind of holy remembrance continues on not only in the Jewish tradition, but our own. When we gather for worship on Sunday, the “Lord’s Day,” we are remembering Christ’s resurrection from death and the creation of a new world.

Living memory is powerful. It keeps us connected to the past in such a way that our present is always full of opportunity for celebration and commemoration. To truly honor what God has done, we take such gifts and make them come “alive” in how we live *now*.

God knows we are a forgetful people – but that’s why we do the same things over and over again to build up our “muscle memory” so we can live out God’s redemption always. Never forgetting, always remembering – ever living for God’s Kingdom now and into the future.

Prayer: *Help us use what symbols we must to remember Your great love, and not only remember it, but make it our present and our future. Great is Your faithfulness. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 8

Read: Psalm 119:65-72

Reflection:

The psalmist finds comfort in God’s instruction because such guidance leads into “goodness.” None of us likely enjoy being told what or how to do something – it rubs up against our individualistic instincts. However, the psalmist praises that kind of shaping as worthy of God’s

loving care, going so far as to claim: “the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (v. 72).

How do we hold onto that sort of value in God’s reformation of our lives? How do we keep God’s love at the core of God’s instruction? It may “humble” us to see how we stray from God’s paths, but that kind of awareness can only further open us to God’s grace.

Discipleship really is a journey of growth – always learning anew how great God’s love is, and how our lives are ever called into that shaping and re-shaping process. It doesn’t make the journey any easier, but it does remind us that God is a gracious teacher.

Prayer: *You are good and do good, O LORD – may I hold ever tightly to Your grace. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 9

Read: Matthew 21:18-22

Reflection:

I guess Jesus doesn’t like fig trees. At first, there seems to be little reason for Jesus doing what he does to the fig tree – it certainly makes our Savior seem a little petulant to curse a plant for failing to produce. Where’s the grace in this act?

The Gospels wove historical narrative into the larger drama of God’s story, like much of the other biblical writers. Matthew is no exception here with Jesus and his “curse” on the fig tree. Israel was called to be a “vine” for the LORD – created to bear fruit for God’s Kingdom. Yet often, there was little fruit to be found, and thus God’s tumultuous relationship with them. In the same way, Jesus has come to Jerusalem and found little “fruit” for God’s Kingdom present.

While we see this story as an exhortation to “believe” and thus have all the power of faith – perhaps what’s at stake is our production of fruit for the Kingdom. Faith in God is that which leads to a life bearing Kingdom “fruits.” Perhaps it’s time our discipleship start producing that which Jesus so longingly searches for: *relationship with God.*

Prayer: *LORD, may we ask for in faith what You have called us to – life in Your Spirit, bearing fruit for Your Kingdom. Amen.*

Thursday, September 10

Read: 1 John 3:11-16

Reflection:

Love *does*. For all our Christian talk of “love,” it is meaningless unless it becomes realized in our daily discipleship. Love is an action, a verb. God’s love *saved* us – God’s love was no mere feeling or sentiment, but an eternal commitment to us which redeems us each and every day.

If we would bear the name of Christ, we cannot allow our love to be just the language we use – it must become our *activity*. If we wish to truly know what love “does” – then we look no further than Jesus. Not only in death, but in life, Jesus commits himself entirely to those around him. Jesus offers up his own life as a living testimony for God’s Kingdom. If we claim to have the “love” of Christ, then we can do nothing less than follow in His stead and commit ourselves to one another.

This self-sacrificial love, this giving of life for one another – it is not just our testimony of God’s life in our own; this is the power of resurrection at work in us: “we know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another” (v. 14).

Prayer: *Unless we show it, LORD, we have not love. May Your love come alive in us, that we may witness to the world in our daily acts of forgiveness, grace, and charity. Amen.*

Friday, September 11

Read: Matthew 6:7-15

Reflection:

Why do we need to be “taught” to pray? Can we not just offer up to God our hearts? Certainly, we may answer “yes” – but the Lord’s Prayer not only teaches us how to pray, it teaches us how to *live*. The Lord’s Prayer shapes us as people of *God’s* Kingdom. Without this guidance, we would turn inward and pray only for ourselves and what *we* want – Jesus tells us to pray “Your kingdom come, Your will be done” (v. 10).

Jesus teaches us that our lives are to be grounded not in *our* desires, but in the singular will of God. After all, if we believe God knows us as our Creator and Redeemer, what have we to fear to pray for God’s will over our own? To allow the Lord’s Prayer to shape the way we pray and live is to align ourselves with the Way of Jesus – for this truly is the prayer *and* shape of His life.

Nothing about this prayer is easy to pray – we are opening ourselves up to Cross and Resurrection with these very words. Yet if we truly want to be disciples *of* Jesus, we will speak and *live* these words daily.

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. Amen.*

Saturday, September 12

There are no texts for today. Instead, practice a true “Sabbath” and rest in the knowledge that You are loved by the God of the universe. Be true to that, and cease striving for anything else.

Prayer: *Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, for You are good, and Your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.*

Sunday, September 13 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-405160> or in-person (with safety protocols), following the guided meditation.

Call to Worship

Leader: Almighty God, we praise You for our redemption that has made us a new creation of Your love and grace. Touch our hearts with grateful wonder at Your faithfulness.

All: Grant us delight in the mercy that has found us and bring the world to rejoice at Your feast of forgiveness. Amen.

Reflection: Exodus 14:19-31; Matthew 18:21-35

Whether you join for worship or study on your own, consider these questions:

- How does gratitude for God’s redemption take shape in your life?
- Is forgiveness of others a way to offer gratitude for God’s forgiveness of us?
- What does gratitude look like during this pandemic? How can we as a community participate in gratefulness as a way to share God’s redemption with others?

Lord’s Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below; praise Him above ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Blessing

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Risen One, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you now and forever. Amen.